

The ANCIENT TREE column

Each month we feature an ancient British tree. This month the Ancient Tree Forum introduces us to...

The Bulbarrow Yew, Dorset

The Ancient Tree Forum's summer conference will be held in Dorset this year, and one of the event's highlights should be a visit to the Bulbarrow Yew on Woolland Hill, in the north of the county. This is a naturally layering tree, which can only be fully appreciated by stepping inside and clambering over its large, low branches.

It is difficult to capture this impressive female yew in photographs, because of its location on a wooded slope, and its sprawling shape. The tree is multi-stemmed, and has a low-domed canopy of some 26m in diameter.

It is thought that the Bulbarrow Yew probably used to grow in open countryside, where it would have been more exposed. As a result, it responded by spreading horizontally more than vertically, and there is no apical dominance. Ancient yews are most easily seen in churchyards, where they are managed and shaped. Left to its own devices, this tree has 'self-layered' through the downward-bending branches taking root and forming new shoots, one of which is now a substantial tree. In some cases, layering has happened more than once. Self-layering is a survival mechanism for yew trees, which can help stabilize the tree and perpetuate its survival.

The Bulbarrow Yew is one of the yew trees featured on a new, interactive map produced for the 'We love Yew' campaign, a project by the Conservation Foundation which celebrates and protects the UK's yews. www.weloveyew.org also features a film about managing veteran yew trees, made by Russell Ball of the Ancient Yew Group.

The Ancient Tree Forum's summer conference takes place in Dorset on Thursday 7 and Friday 8 July.

The ATF champions the biological, cultural and heritage value of Britain's ancient and veteran trees and promotes best practice in their management. See www.ancienttreeforum.co.uk



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